



Commonwealth of Kentucky
Office of the Governor

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Governor, First Lady, Commissioner Celebrate New Statewide
School Attendance Age**

'Graduate Kentucky' law will keep students in school to age 18

FRANKFORT, KY (Jan. 29, 2015) – Today, Governor Steve Beshear, First Lady Jane Beshear and Kentucky Department of Education Commissioner Terry Holliday gathered to praise local boards of education across Kentucky and celebrate a statewide increase in the compulsory school attendance age.

Senate Bill 97 (2013), also known as the “Graduate Kentucky” bill, cleared the way for each school district to adopt a policy raising the dropout age from 16 to 18, amending the school attendance law created in 1934. The boards of education in all 173 school districts in the state have now approved such a policy.

“The time when a student could drop out of high school and find a dependable, good-paying job is long gone,” said Gov. Beshear. “It only makes sense that if we want students to be successful after graduation from high school, they need to stay in school long enough to gain the skills and knowledge they will need for college, career and to become a productive resident of our state.”

Keeping students in school creates significant benefits not only for the students themselves, but also for the communities where they live. Economists predict that if the high school dropouts of 2009 had graduated, the Kentucky economy would have realized an additional \$4.2 billion in wages over those students’ lifetimes.

In addition, research shows that high school graduates live longer, are less likely to be teen parents and are more likely to raise healthier, better-educated children. High school graduates are also less likely to commit crimes, rely on government healthcare or use other public services.

“This is truly a great day for our students and the Commonwealth of Kentucky,” said Mrs. Beshear. “We have worked with legislators and education leaders for more than seven years to promote the passage of the Graduate Kentucky bill and are thrilled that statewide implementation of this long-overdue policy finally is at hand.”

In most districts the new law will take effect with the beginning of the 2015-16 school year. Starting this fall, even those students who have already dropped out of school will be required to return to classes until their 18th birthday or they graduate, whichever comes first.

“This is the right thing for Kentucky students,” said Commissioner Holliday. “But for the true impact to be felt, we cannot simply warehouse these students in classrooms until they turn 18. Our schools must engage these students, to connect academic content to real-world skills and opportunities, to find out what students are passionate about and as one of our educators put it, ‘to help them connect school work to a skill set that gives meaning to their goals and dreams.’”

The Kentucky Department of Education provided each district with a \$10,000 grant to plan for implementation of the higher dropout age.

It is expected that the higher compulsory school attendance age will help drive up Kentucky’s already high graduation rate. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, for the 2012-13 school year, Kentucky had the fourth highest graduation rate in the country at 86 percent, placing Kentucky as tied for ninth-highest among all states. The most recent data from the 2013-14 school year shows Kentucky’s graduation rate improved to 87.5 percent. In recent years, the state also has increased the college/career-readiness rate of its students, which now stands at 62.4 percent, up from 34 percent in 2010.

“Our goal is for every one of our students to graduate from high school ready for college, career and life,” Holliday said.

More information about Graduate Kentucky and resources available to school districts is available at the Kentucky Department of Education [website](#).

Read how the policy is playing out in one early adopter district [here](#).

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Governor Beshear's press releases are available on his official website at www.governor.ky.gov